



Criminal Division

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REMARKS* TO THE
COBB COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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*Note: Mr. Wray frequently speaks from notes and may depart from the speech as prepared.

Thank you, Janie, for that kind introduction, and thank you all for the invitation to be here. It's great to be home and a real honor to help recognize and celebrate these distinguished public safety officers.

One of the best parts of my job is being able to work with and thank men and women just like all of the award nominees here today – strong and brave folks working on the front lines of the effort to keep all Americans safe.

Now, in my experience, folks like these are pretty humble, and occasions like this tend to make them think they can't wait to get out of here and back in their patrol cars or fire trucks or ambulances. Well, I apologize to them for making them sit here a little while longer, but I think tributes like this one are important and special for a few reasons.

First, it's frankly pretty inspiring for the rest of us to hear the stories of their bravery and loyalty to the public, and to be reminded that we have real-life heroes sitting right here among us.

Second, it's important for us to have a dedicated chance to thank them and let them know how much we truly appreciate their sacrifices, and the sacrifices of their families. And we owe a particularly deep thanks to those who've made the ultimate sacrifice – as the empty seat at each table reminds us. It's kind of like why we have Mother's Day and Father's Day – of course we should thank our moms and dads and make them breakfast in bed every day, but we often let those chances to express our gratitude slip away from us. So it reflects very well on the Chamber to have this celebration every year.

Finally – and this is what I want to spend some time talking about today – this is a particularly compelling time for public safety officers to come together as a team. All of you, here in Cobb County, are joined by teammates – in all of our Nation's cities, at all levels of government, on our borders, at our airports, in faraway places like Afghanistan and Iraq – who, just like you, are getting up before it's light, and going home after it's dark, and doing whatever it takes to keep us and our loved ones safe.

The need for a well-coordinated campaign against terror has never been greater. More than three years after September 11, it's natural for that day to start to resemble some kind of hazy, horrible nightmare. But it was no bad dream. Every morning, those of us in the law enforcement, intelligence, and military communities confront the threat on a very real basis when we sit down to review the daily intelligence. We know that there are plenty of people out there who would gladly take the place of the September 11 hijackers, who are just as intent on killing more innocent people. These guys are sophisticated, cunning, disciplined, and utterly committed to mass murder. Figures like Usama bin Laden urge their followers to kill more Americans as some sort of holy duty.

Recent events overseas remind us that terrorists still have the desire and the capability to strike us at home with little or no warning. For example, just a couple of weeks ago, terrorists set off a bomb outside the Australian Embassy in Indonesia, killing 9 and injuring 180. Just a week earlier, Chechen terrorists stormed a school near Moscow, took 1,200 hostages, and ultimately killed 335 of them, mostly children. In April, British authorities arrested nine terrorist suspects and seized half a ton of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, a bomb component, in a storage garage near London's Heathrow Airport. And according to intelligence estimates, 15 to 20,000 terrorists have been trained in Al Qaeda-affiliated camps in Afghanistan since bin Laden established them back in 1996. We only have to remember how much harm 19 of those men caused on 9/11 to understand the threat that any one of these thousands poses. This is especially true when we know that Al Qaeda remains absolutely intent on obtaining and using chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

It's easy for folks across the country to believe that the threat of terrorism only exists in places like downtown Manhattan or Washington, D.C., or that the war on terror is only being fought overseas. I can see how a person would think that; you read lots of stories about ambushes and firefights in the hills of Afghanistan, an embassy bombing in Indonesia, and a school stormed in Chechnya.

Unfortunately, the threat's just not limited that way. Even the stories from overseas can touch us painfully right here at home, like the sad passing of American civilians in Iraq who are helping reconstruct that country, like Jack Hensley, a native of Marietta.

And terrorists long ago gained footholds everywhere, even in our own backyards. We've pursued terrorism cases in places like Portland, Oregon; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Lackawanna, New York; and Tampa, Florida. And those are just some of the cases I can talk about. And the cells don't include just aliens: Some of our own citizens are implicated. We recently teamed up with the military to catch a National Guardsman in Washington state who was trying to feed information to Al Qaeda. Chillingly, the arrest came as the guy's unit was preparing to deploy to Iraq. He's since been convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

Over the past several months, senior Administration officials have reported an increased risk for a terrorist attack up through our elections in November and beyond. We know that our homeland remains a top Al Qaeda target, and credible reporting now indicates that Al Qaeda is moving forward with plans to carry out an attack in the U.S. in an effort to disrupt our democratic process. Right now, we don't know exactly when, where, and how they plan to attack, but we're doing everything we can to figure that out, disrupt and prevent it. The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces are at "full throttle" now: We're being as aggressive as possible in our preventative efforts, and we're going to interview and re-interview hundreds of individuals in the coming weeks. We're especially vigilant now – we have to be. We need to leave no stone unturned.

These efforts illustrate how we confront and beat the terrorist threat: by taking the fight *to* the enemy, instead of waiting for them to come to us. Pursuing and prosecuting terrorists *after* an attack is part of our mission, but it's not our top priority. A good defense is important, but it's just not enough. We have to be proactive, not just reactive.

All of the policemen, firemen, rangers, and paramedics represented in this room prove their bravery and their commitment to our safety every day. To you, our first responders to disaster, heroism is definitely in your job description. And our communities know and appreciate that all of you stand vigilant and ready to respond to anything, including a terrorist attack. But I know I speak for everyone when I say that responding to an attack that's already occurred is absolutely the last thing that any of us want you to have to do. That's why our country's entire anti-terrorism team – from intelligence agents, to prosecutors and investigators, to local police, to TSA officers, to customs and border patrol officers – is doing everything we can to prevent and disrupt terrorist attacks in the first place.

One key part of our offensive strategy is to not only go after the actual perpetrators of violence, but to target their supporters as well. We're working to dismantle the entire terrorist network – from the front-line killers to the fundraisers – to maximize our chances of taking out those upon whom terrorist operations depend. Another way to see and understand our approach is to think of the chronology of a terrorist plot – a continuum from idea, to planning, to preparation (including fundraising and other support, training, reconnaissance and so on), to execution and attack. We need to strike earlier and earlier on that continuum – we'd much rather catch terrorists with their hands on a check than on a bomb.

Let me give you a couple of examples of that strategy in action. The first is a case we took down just a few hours away from here, up in Charlotte. A couple of years ago, we convicted a group of guys in a cigarette smuggling plot. They'd been buying cigarettes in North Carolina, driving them up to Michigan, and selling them there without paying Michigan's higher cigarette taxes.

Sounds pretty run-of-the-mill, right? What could some bush-league cigarette smugglers have to do with dangerous international terrorists? Well, a lot, actually – what really mattered was where the defendants' profits were going. These guys were sending some of their smuggling proceeds to Hizballah, a group based in Lebanon that was designated by our Secretary of State as a foreign terrorist organization. Hizballah is responsible for many

terrorist attacks throughout the Middle East; many of you will remember that they were behind the October 1983 truck bombing in Beirut that killed 241 Marines, and the 1984 suicide bombing of our embassy there that killed 17 Americans. Well, the Charlotte defendants were sending the group hundreds of thousands of dollars to stock up their terrorist toolboxes. We found out from the Canadian intelligence service, which was investigating some of these guys' cohorts north of the border, that the group was funding the purchase of night-vision goggles, GPS systems, and laser range-finders for Hizballah operatives. For his role in this plot, the lead defendant was sentenced to 155 years in federal prison.

Every public safety officer in this room is somewhat used to being called a first responder to disaster – in that sense, you're a key part of our defense against terror. But we also need you to be a key part of that offense in the fight to prevent terrorist attacks – through your vigilance, your instincts, your experience, and your dedication.

In the Charlotte Hizballah cell case I just mentioned, the entire investigation got started when an off-duty police officer, working as a security guard at a cigarette wholesaler, noticed young men entering the building with grocery bags full of cash. The men lined up at the cashiers with 299 cartons of cigarettes each, while one of them stood at the register and paid cash as the others came through. Next, they loaded the cigarettes into minivans and sped off. Why'd they buy 299 cartons each? Because at the time, it was illegal to transport more than 300 cartons of cigarettes into another state unless they were marked with that state's tax stamp.

Well, the off-duty officer thought something was fishy about all this, and his report eventually made its way to the ATF and the FBI's local Joint Terrorism Task Force, or “JTTF” – a team of local, state, and federal officials devoted to detecting and disrupting terrorist activity. The convictions in that case, and the disruption of the flow of funds to Hizballah, all began with that one officer's vigilance and the cooperation between folks at all levels of law enforcement.

Another example: In Portland, Oregon, we broke up another terrorist cell whose members tried to travel to Afghanistan after September 11 to fight for the Taliban. They wanted to do some firearms training first, so they gathered with their pistols and rifles at a gravel pit in rural Washington state and started firing away. The noise caught the attention of Sheriff's Deputy Mark Mercer, who was so suspicious that he took down all their names and filed a report. That report made it to the local JTTF, and eventually led to the arrest and conviction of six defendants who are now serving sentences between 3 and 18 years in federal prison.

I mention these stories for a couple of reasons. First, every one of you *can* help and be a part of our team's offense against terrorists. Second, we *need* your help. We at the FBI and the Justice Department just don't have enough eyes and ears, enough feet on the ground, to singlehandedly keep Americans as safe as they need to be. We realize you're all being asked to do more with less, but we're counting on your help.

I'd like to leave you with one more story about teamwork in the fight against terror – teamwork not only between all levels of public safety officers, but also with the public at large.

Most of you have already heard a little about the case of Richard Reid, the guy who tried to blow up American Airlines Flight 63 over the Atlantic Ocean by igniting a bomb in his shoe. Well, public vigilance was the main reason that this incident didn't end in tragedy. If it wasn't for the airline passengers and crew who confronted Richard Reid as he lit his device, terrorists might have claimed yet more innocent lives. When Reid attacked the flight attendant who tried to stop him, another passenger reached over the seat to restrain Reid's arms. Others rushed to restrain his legs. Still others donated their belts to tie Reid down. A doctor on board sedated Reid. Another passenger held a fire extinguisher as a weapon, guarding Reid for the rest of the flight. On that flight, every passenger was vigilant, every passenger was an air marshal, every passenger a hero. And because of their vigilance, 197 passengers and crew made it to the ground safely that day. Reid is now serving a life sentence in federal prison. Our enemy's ruthlessness and sophistication require all of us to be vigilant against threats to ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities.

With this kind of vigilance and cooperation; with the valor of men and women like those we honor today; and with our commitment to using every tool that the laws, the evidence, and the Constitution allow us, we can all maintain the greatest and freest system in the world while keeping all of our people safe. Thanks for having me.